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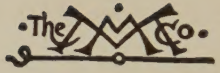
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# SATURDAY PAPERS

## ESSAYS ON LITERATURE

FROM

*The Literary Review*

THE FIRST VOLUME OF SELECTIONS FROM

*The Literary Review of*

The New York Evening Post

BY

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY
WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT
AMY LOVEMAN

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# PREFACE

WE HAVE tried vainly to classify these essays. They will follow no order, progress by no logical development of thought, because they were written each in its time and place, at a moment of irony, or anger, or delight, or illumination. And yet we believe that this book has unity. It contains a view of literature and life which is sincere and perfectly definite. Although the product of several minds, it represents but a single philosophy of good writing and practicable art. It is a literary program in parcels instead of in bulk.

THE AUTHORS.

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# RED BRICK LITERATURE

You can readily note the effect of too much city dwelling on a man, and you can almost as easily tell when too much city dwelling lies behind a book. The effect is similar, except that the man may get over it, while the book cannot: it is finished.

The signs of too much red brick, too much granite and steel, too much roar and rattle in a book are unmistakable, especially too much red brick. The overurbanized book is intelligent, its thought moves quickly, it is vivid, it is clever, and sometimes smart. Its style is nervous, and though it may be bad, it is never dull. But dust gets into the lungs of the cockney book and produces a thousand

tiny irritations that prickle out in oversensitized words. The never-ceasing patter of hurrying humanity, the crash and groan of machines, make the authors irritable, and their books are irritable. We have now a school of irritable poetry, and we are getting a school of irritable fiction. In the irritable novel every one is disagreeable (including the author), no one is virtuous or wants to be, breakfast conversations consist chiefly of sneers, and nasty smells and ugly sights are as common as fresh-smelling linen in Victorian homes. In irritable poetry the phrases "I am weary," "I am angry," "I hate," "I am bored" recur with some regularity. The poems themselves are swift successions of painful images like sparks of anger shot out by a departing pedestrian whose foot has been trod on in the crowd. The utterance is broken and feverish like conversation in a

packed and swaying surface car. There is no clear beginning and seldom an end.

In red brick literature there is also a curious lack of purpose, like the apparent lack of any important purpose in so much swarming, chattering city life. The poetry is material for poetry merely: vivid, tensely vivid lines, fragments that record the unpleasant impact of sensations upon a mind made sensitive by jars, rattles, and inescapable contact with millions of men. It has the inconsecutiveness of a plunge into a subway for a ride to the next station, or crossing Broadway at Forty-second Street. The novels, too, are purposeless in any large sense—vivid transcripts of experiences that are typical of nothing but the unhappiest of a thousand apartments, narratives where the energy of the author goes into sensitized studies of behavior, precisely as one may spend a roaring

subway trip focussing the mind upon some face across the way, until the last wrinkle or blotch has found a word to describe it.

Red brick literature, indeed, tends always to the morbid, if we use morbid in its usual modern meaning, a brooding on the evidence of the senses. Or it escapes morbidity by being smart or sensational. It needs air, space, light, repose, meditation, solitude.

We do not complain of cities. They are at the worst necessary evils and at the best the testing grounds of the intellect. But taken in continued, unremitted doses, become a daily, yearly habit, city life is—not fatal, for the thought of some illustrious London cockneys, and even more distinguished Parisians, makes us pause at that word—but overstimulative to the literary person. It makes him unduly conscious of an ego which minute by minute is rubbed and scraped by the egos of

so many others. It makes him unduly concerned with mediocrity, since where there is not even a bench without a man or a woman sitting on it mediocrity is forced upon him.

We do not advocate a migration from Greenwich Village to the suburbs or the prairies. By no means. It is better to have lived and lost the power to write truly than never to have lived in search of it at all. But let these writers sometimes pack up their bags and get out of the streets, out of the studios, out of the subway, off and apart from human cliques and congeries and the noisy mass of mankind. The best criticism of many a novel is a beech woods in March, and a thundering sea on a misty beach is the answer to much febrile poetry. Americans, apparently, grow sentimental when they have too much nature, if, indeed, the writers about the untamed West can ever be said really to

experience nature at all: they grow neurotic rapidly with too little. Lilacs in the back-yard of a tenement, starved trees in a worn park, are pretty and pathetic, but poor substitutes for the bay and cedar of a Connecticut hillside or the pines of Arizona mountains. He who loves the city must leave it, and leave it often, or he will love it neither wisely nor well.

H. S. C.

## WHY DON'T THEY STOP?

WHY are there so many able English novelists, and so few really distinguished American novelists? It is because the American writer will not pay the price of distinction, being too concerned with prices of a different character.

We are all weary of the economic interpretation of everything, including literature, because economics usually have to be explained by the soul of man or the climate. But it seems that the social economics of the United States does explain much in the present status of American literature.

The American novelist begins his career with a "crude but powerful" novel that does not succeed, and a few well-made short

stories that do. Two years later his mind has cleared, his eye sharpened, his pen grown more skilful. He writes a novel that serializes successfully, disposes of 20,000 copies, and then sells his story to the melting pot of the movies for a very substantial check. His six months' work has brought him what for most professional men would be two years' good income. His name is known, his market is ready, all he has to do is to write. Skill he possesses and a knowledge of his public. Only his art is incomplete. It lacks finish, it lacks depth, it lacks most of all the maturity that comes from ardent, unremitting labor; and he knows it. His style is good; it is not excellent. It expresses his imaginings; it will not, like a great style, preserve them. Why doesn't he stop large-scale production, and learn to write?

This is the turning point, and nine out of

ten *able* Americans turn to the left. They increase facility; they do not intensify their art. They lay hands upon more of the public; they do not tighten their grip. They write more books, but not better books.

Why don't they stop? Since they belong to a nation of speculators, why are they so unwilling to speculate with their popularity? Why do they invest their capital of reputation dully in the routine of a standardized output, instead of using it to produce something new, something better, which will bring them satisfaction as well as cash? Are they timid, these captains-of-fiction, or are they more enamored of luxury than of their profession?

Neither implication is wholly true, but there is truth in both. If Geoffry Wildairs, the successful author, makes $10,000 a year, he contracts obligations in the form of auto-

mobiles, clubs, and a taste for Southern climates in February that require fifteen thousand to satisfy them; and there is no sure way of making ten thousand grow to fifteen thousand while perfecting one's art, while, having learned to write well, learning to write better. Therefore he pursues the nymph of luxury instead of the goddess of fame, and finds her quite as elusive, and knows her to be less excellent.

No one asks the American novelist to starve like his Grub Street predecessor. For Geoffry Wildairs and his fellows that is quite unnecessary. We grant him five, ten, even fifteen thousand a year as a "living wage"; and his attempt to dig in, to consolidate his art, is not likely, as publishing goes nowadays, to cause much, if any diminution. But he must say: "I have enough income to keep me afloat; now for good work."

Why doesn't he say it? Is the professional spirit less strong in America than in England and France? Has writing with us become a business, with the code of a business instead of a profession? Do we lack the strength of resistance which alone enables a writer to write for sufficient profits from great excellence, instead of great profits from continuing mediocrity? For it is weak to write a "strong novel" when one can write a good one. And in the long run it is foolish. Not even in this heyday of short-story and movie profits can an author keep up with a profiteer, a picture star, or a stock manipulator. The ultimate luxury is ever beyond his reach. He may achieve four bathrooms, but scarcely an indoor swimming pool. He may own two cars and a saddle horse, but three and a stable will be out of his reach.

When the money begins to come in a

steady flow instead of drop by drop, when one's name goes from the bottom to the top of the column, then is the time to take counsel with perfection, to consult the desires of the spirit, to ask whether it is better to be the author of five good books or ten thousand facile pages.

There are, at a guess, fifty American novelists making this year incomes so large that only extravagance can spend them. Ten of these are writing precisely what their Lord and Maker in His inscrutable wisdom created them to write. Ten are convinced that next year they will slow down production and go on a quality instead of a quantity basis. Ten have hardened their hearts and long since thrown over vain regrets for what they might have written. Five have won through to a success they never expected by doing the best that was in them, let come

what might. And the rest, however high-hearted and flippantly cynical in public, are familiar with the dead spaces of the night when there is gnashing of teeth for the reward which alone tempts them—the reward of a durable excellence—now known to be forever out of reach.

H. S. C.

# THE TWO AMERICAS

AMERICA as the novelist sees it just now is a very confusing country. Indeed it is not one country at all, but two, and outwardly they very little resemble each other.

One is the dun America and the other is rosy America. The dun America is a land of back yards, spittoons, Main Streets, cement walks, shiny stiff rooms, and ugliness everywhere. It is inhabited by fearfully bourgeois people, whose humor is confined to "jollying," and whose life, for the males, is business, and either drinking or fishing, or both; and for the females, gossip or bridge, or both. Its range of interests is about as broad as the front yard and as long as Main

Street, no longer. When it goes to parties to amuse itself it is either barbarous or vulgar or stupid, or all three of them. Its attitude toward international politics is that of 1890, its opinion of labor problems dates from before the industrial revolution. The prevailing dunness is shot through with streaks of yellow and weak violet, but dingy is its color, dingy its soul.

In sharp, in impossible contrast is rosy America. This is a land of hearty villages and vigorous towns, clean and prosperous, shrewd and homely, kindly and in the best sense aspiring. It is a land of quaint wise age and naïve youth. It is humorous, it is energetic: it won the war even if it did not fight much of it, saved Europe from starving, and showed itself capable of organization as well as sacrifice. It is a common-sense country, deeply idealistic, and its æsthetic sense has

already outrun its environment. New York amuses it, the immigrants do not dismay it, its "home towns," with all their imperfections, it adores.

Which is the true America? Which are the true observers? The writers who give us rosy America (if we exclude the sentimentalists) are intelligent people, good to meet, good to talk with, wise and humorous. They have been a little too fortunate in their own lives perhaps for absolute clarity of vision; but they convince you of their America—are they not of it!

The writers who write of dun America, on the contrary, are usually rebels against environment, men and women who have felt themselves misfits in the home town, misfits in college, critics of the existing order wherever they lived, and happy nowhere. They are the nomads who wander from oasis to

oasis, their horses always saddled, their arrows ever bright.

Are there then rather than two Americas only two states of mind, two sets of experiences, two moods of observation which turn plain America into sweetness or bile? That is a conclusion too weak to stand upon.

For, of course, the two-sidedness is in America as well as in the observers. The virtues and the faults are both there. From the window one sees a jumble of ugly brick walls, a sky tainted by coal smoke, signs offensive in vulgarity as in ugliness. Yet beneath is a good sort of people busy supporting families that are cheery as often as mean minded, as often interested in China, child welfare, good books, and happy conversation as in the price of stocks, the sins of their neighbors, and alcohol. In short, no Main Street is just as it looks to any individual at

any given moment of mood and time. But this is a conclusion too platitudinous to rest upon.

For the two Americas which interest us are by no means so simple as the ancient struggle between good and evil that goes on in every village. They are special phases of this old conflict and just now they may be denominated city and town.

The city in America has gathered to itself sweetness and vigor; it has sucked from the country whence all strength comes, and now goes back for refreshment. The city encourages breadth of thinking and living. It encourages and rewards vitality. But it is the city also which is the prime vulgarizer, which produces the man without angles and without home, the woman without occupation, the life without individuality. And the city is master.

The town is slave. It apes the city and apes it badly. Its vulgarity is second-best and its mediocrity imitative. Its faults are all displayed on Main Street, like cans of vegetables in a grocer's window. City faults are easier to study in a town than in the place of their origin because they are unrelieved and cruder. Yet the town keeps its individuality, keeps its pride, keeps its friendships. It is the country freshman in college, with big, hearty hands, and a big, hearty voice, and a big heart under impossible "college cut" clothes, acquiring vices that when he is more civilized he will forget.

The American soul is passing from the country through the town to the city, and perhaps back to the town and on to the country again. It was the country that first engaged our novelists. Then it was the city.

Now, for a while, because it reveals our soul in transition, it is the small town. The rosy writers on the whole see not untruly. The American town is not all Main Street, and Main Street is not as bad as it is painted, or even built. Ugliness is a phase of transition, like the unshaven chin on Sunday morning. The city, with all its leadership toward light and sweetness of living, is more dangerous than the town to America.

But the nomads come sweeping down upon our complacencies like the Arabs and the Scythians that Wells describes, restlessly discontent, stirring up our fat lives, pricking illusions, shooting arrows of satire down smug streets. They disturb us, but they keep us moving. They make us feel the dunness of life that has lost the simple reality of labor and has not yet reached breadth of

interest and experience. Now that the Indian and the pioneer and the cowboy have gone, and the founders have become stolid and wealthy, Main Street needs them.

H. S. C.

## NOVELS NOWADAYS

It is no unusual thing to hear at any dinner table emphatically derogatory comment from those of an elder and more discretionary generation upon the somewhat embittering subject of "novels nowadays." The concomitant reminder is usually (though expressed otherwise) of the delightfully sedative qualities of the great Victorian contributions to literature. By comparison how much pleasanter, nobler, and so on. . . .

But the novel of manners was a dynamic force in the Victorian era. Is not the elder generation looking back upon its great heyday rather for what one H. A. Taine called "minute details and practical counsels" than for the "imagination and dreams" it fur-

nished the audience of its own period? The vital social anger of Dickens is forgotten, perhaps, in approving the "delicacy and devotion" of his heroes—the gloomy satire of Thackeray in the "quaintness" of an Amelia Sedley. It is all so odd and pleasant and old-fashioned and far away. And then these authors were such great moralists.

Where, however, Dickens and Thackeray are loved by the younger generation it is not for any such stale virtuousness; it is rather for their living virtuosity, their wit, sincerity, and creative power. And the younger generation seeks even further.

It seeks beneath the individual consciousness, so typical of all human nature, into the unconscious, so strongly differentiated in each individual by impedimenta of early influence and training. Scientific research into human motives and behavior has added much

to our knowledge since the Victorian era; all this the contemporary writer has at his disposal. Many are beginning to profit by it. A character's motives are subject to a more extended survey; the casual impressions of the individual acquire greater momentousness. A deeper sympathy on the part of the author, even for the "villain of the piece," is increasingly apparent.

But the point surely is that we live to-day in a more subjective age. It is an age of the individual's explanation of himself. Authority, even the conventions that the greatest of the Victorians tacitly accepted, has everywhere been called into question. Mere presentation of life as a panorama above which the author sits like a god, even though a sardonic god, upholding certain tables of the law, has taken on a certain taint of superficiality. The picture of society is now pre-

sented far more through the deep reactions of one individual than as a conglomerate whole where a great variety of interesting creatures move, weaving "plots," restricted by the necessity of not stepping out of their own "characters" in the scheme.

In short, the author has descended from Olympus. Life is approached merely through the eyes of one particularly sophisticated individual in it. For a certain gain there is usually corresponding loss. But the methods of approach in novel-writing are changing, because the times have changed. It is rather futile to expect life to be static—to expect the methods of one age to be the same as that of another that is past.

If a comparison is demanded as to "greatness" perhaps Emerson's squirrel may answer for us, as he did to the mountain, "If I cannot carry forests on my back, neither can

you crack a nut." Joyce's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" need hardly be damned because it is not the "Hamlet" of Shakespeare. It is an attempt to do something entirely different.

Again, if the question of the "morality" of the modern novelist prove a burning one, as it ever has and ever will, a calm consideration of the great novels of the world's literature might greatly disillusionize the orthodox. And if the Anglo-Saxon novel be growing more European—a consummation we hardly dare hope for—why, after all, those novels that the European viewpoint has produced are not altogether negligible. Our idea in America of the function of the novelist can stand a little improvement.

For how does Taine deal with the "morality" of the great Victorians? "It is therefore to ignore man, to reduce him . . . to

an aggregate of virtues and vices; it is to lose sight in him of all but the exterior and social side; it is to neglect the inner and natural element. You will find the same fault in English criticism, always moral, never psychological . . ."

Perhaps it is for this reason, neglect of that "inner and natural element," that "novels nowadays" have been tending so pronouncedly toward autobiographical analysis. More and more the psychological, among the books that matter; less and less the "moral."

And the interest of the younger generation in this trend is both healthy and hopeful. It is a sounding for greater depth. The old-style novel of manners was not enough. Even its worthiest successors in our own period pall. The seine of literature is let down deeper beneath life's apparent level, into

further fathoms of the sea of motive and complex impulse. Thus peculiar things are dredged to the surface; some things, indeed, at which the elder generation shudders and from which it hastily averts its eyes. For the author does not moralize about them, he seems only to seek a more universal understanding. Yet throughout the history of literature this has been the guiding motive of the true creator. His main problem is simply to render all human action as intelligible as possible in the light of his own time.

W. R. B.

## THE PLAIN PERSON

WHAT does the plain, everyday person want in his books?

He wants "good English." Not shimmering experiments with rare words; nor daring combinations of clauses that explode into dashes and dots. Not long words solemnly arranged—he has long since outgrown respect for that kind of pedantry. Not, by any means, halting, imperfect sentences, with bad grammar in them, nor sloppy writing that means two things at once. These last are precisely what he does not want. He desires good English, and he does not have to be a stylist in order to know when he gets it.

He also wants life as it is, or life as he would like to have it.

If it is to be life as it is, then he desires life as he knows it. He does not favor pictures of societies more intellectual than intelligent, where all the talk is of art, technique, motifs, tastes, suppressed ambitions, and compressed experiences. He does not want to read of people whose work, play, and love are never just what they seem to be, but always significant socially or psychologically, importing horrid lessons for the race if it doesn't watch out. He likes his sociology straight, when he likes it at all. He does not care to read of families where tendencies toward sex indulgence, hysteria, hatred, crime break out before breakfast and devastate the household by night. He is perfectly well aware of such tendencies in himself and in his own family, but tries with some success to hold them in check, and prefers a book with equal self-restraint.

He craves a book world where he may find all the intensely real things he sees in glimpses now and then in his own life, but of which he has never enough. The humors and the adventure of experience in odd corners. The character, good and bad, that comes out like colors in the sunshine at crises. The nobleness of life that he admires, the success he longs for, the pathos which makes him sorry, the tragedy that he feels underlying, and the meanness that he can hate. These things he knows are true, and he likes to read of them.

But if it is not to be the truth about the world he knows, then he wants to hear of the world as he would like to have it—of romance. But he doesn't wish it all kisses and tears and moral platitudes. Nor all wild exploits of movie heroes. Nor all happy tales of silly happy people. It must be a world

where a man can take his common sense and a woman her humor. It must not revolve on a movie plot designed for immigrants and the illiterate. He wants to read of a life where a sensible but not unromantic person, who is neither neurotic nor brainless, might thoroughly enjoy himself.

And who is the plain, everyday person when it comes to reading books? He is all of us, with the exception of the connoisseur, the specialist, and the loving appraiser of books, whose long apprenticeship to good reading gives them the means as well as the right to a greater catholicity. It is all of us, except the foppish and eccentric readers, the newfangled and the supercilious, the diseased of mind and the warped æsthetically. It is all of us, except the barbarian and the half literate, the vulgar in taste and the indifferent. And this leaves so many that it is strange

that authors who write for money and good repute, and publishers who prefer a sure twenty thousand to a speculative thousand do not consider us more carefully. For when we get what we want we will buy and read and pass it on even unto the next generation.

There must always be a fringe of the experimental in literature—poems bizarre in form and curious in content, stories that overreach for what has not hitherto been put in story form, criticism that mingles a search for new truth with bravado. We should neither scoff at this trial margin not take it too seriously. Without it, literature becomes inert and complacent. But the everyday person's reading is not, ought not to be, in the margin. He asks for a less experimental diet, and his choice is sound. If authors and publishers would give him more heed they

would do wisely. They are afraid of the swarming populace who clamor for vulgar sensation (and will pay only what it is worth), and they are afraid of petulant *literati* who insist upon sophisticated sensation (and desire complimentary copies). The stout middle class, as in politics and industry, has far less influence than its good sense and its good taste and its ready purse deserve.

H. S. C.

## TO THE GENERAL READER

The American reader has been abused. Whenever an editorial writer needs a topic, or a critic desires to be quoted, or an author loses his temper, the American reader is the victim. He is superficial, he is sentimental; he is lazy, he is ignorant; he is stingy, he is provincial; he is everything that will fill up a newspaper paragraph or make a stinging review criticism.

It is not our purpose here to defend the general reader, although we know him well, and like him. On the contrary, it is our desire at this writing to add one more charge to the account, the charge which in our judgment is most worth making against his literary integrity. But chivalry requires that he

should be cleared of false imputations before renewed chastening.

Now, American readers are not a bit more superficial or lazy or sentimental or ignorant or stingy or provincial than British readers or French or German. There may be more Americans fond of sentimental books, because far more Americans read books. Nothing could exceed the depths of slushiness into which the relatively few British of the semi-literate classes who read books at all descend. Any traveller who will study an English newsstand shelf may convince himself of that. Likewise, there may be more numerically of lazy readers, superficial readers, provincial readers, ignorant readers in a country like America, where reading is a national habit than in foreign parts, where it is still a class peculiarity. As for stinginess, the publishers have been trying to convict the

American public of buying too few books, and rightly, for it is the purchase of good reading in permanent form that stabilizes culture; yet one should consider the money spent by the average American family yearly for reading matter, much of which, though periodical in form, is good, and later goes into books. Nowhere in the world is there anything comparable to our voracious reading of periodical literature, and while the habit has its serious abuses it should not be underrated, scorned, or hastily condemned.

So much, therefore, by way of clearing the air of too often repeated accusations. Our own charge against the general reader is as general as he is, and is directed against literate and semi-literate alike. The American reader is generous and appreciative, he applauds mental agility and cleverness, he has a keen sense for action, a healthy distrust of

rhetoric, and a ready approval for whatever interests him; but his sense of beauty is dull. He does not ask for beauty, he does not expect beauty, and when he gets beauty he often does not recognize it.

The reference is not to "purple patches" and literary ornamentation of the encrusted variety. This is an often deceptive beauty that we are all of us likely to praise unread. Beauty in a completer sense is what is meant —that organic beauty which comes as naturally as dew upon grass when the imagination is true and piercing and the garment of expression fits the thought like a gown. Reflection and depth of emotion have much to do with such beauty—and in general American readers do not appreciate depth of feeling, as is too clear from the books we praise as "deep." Perfect workmanship, where a structure of words arises like a build-

ing from the idea of the architect, is another factor—and we Americans are insensitive to perfect workmanship, as is proved by our ready enthusiasm for mere cleverness and our tardy recognition of the writings of Cather and Hergesheimer and Cabell and Frost and Robinson and Santayana, where the author has dealt with his theme as a great portrait painter with his subject, ceasing labor only when he has written the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of what he sees and feels.

It is two very simple things one would ask of the general reader—merely to be discontented with short cuts to literature; stories that are told just to fill out ingenious plots, poems that rephrase platitudes, essays that are smart but get nowhere—all writing that is machine-made, insincere, sloppy, meretricious, flat, stale, and unprofitable; and next,

to ask for beauty in the right sense, to ask that a story or a poem be beautiful as a cathedral, a sword, a steel building, a race horse, an automobile, a carved gem can be beautiful. We are a slovenly race but a clever one, and we can give the public what it wants when it wants it. Doubtless the pearls cast before swine were artificial; and our writers' pearls have often been artificial too, because their audience, although risen far above husks, has been content with fabricated gems. Authors will have more real pearls to sell when there is a better market for them.

H. S. C.

## PROSPERO AND THE "PICTURES"

*Fer.* This is a most majesticke vision, and
Harmonious charmingly: may I be bold
To thinke these spirits?
*Pro.* Spirits, which by mine Art
I have from their confines call'd to enact
My present fancies.
*Fer.* Let me live here ever,
So rare a wondred Father, and a wise
Makes this place Paradise.

SINCE the somewhat morganatic marriage of literature to the "movies" there have been but few "majesticke visions." Many experiments have been made in the adapting of novels and stories to the screen, and much time and money have been wasted. So has much sage advice. Nevertheless, we should like to venture a suggestion.

We feel that in their choice of literature the producers have overlooked one realm of fiction peculiarly adapted to transformation into moving pictures, by reason of the mechanical resources of the latter. We refer to what we may roughly term the "literature of fantasy"—a type of literature out of which the stage finds it mechanically impossible to make convincing plays, but out of which the devices of the movie camera could easily create not only ocular delights but magic illusions not to be bettered even by the most masterly writing. Yet the movies remain content with mere "trick films" and animated cartoons, and, when they turn to stories, plunge heavily on ultra-sensational and ultra-moral dramas of modern life, with plots the most puerile, sentimental, and obvious.

Yet we believe the producer of "pictures" might be a veritable Prospero at enchanting

many Ferdinands, figured as his audience. Certainly there is an Ariel in his service at the wave of whose wand any optical illusion is possible, from the djinn of the Arabian Nights taking substance from the spiralling smoke of the fisherman's jar to the comic possibilities of such a masterpiece of short fiction as H. G. Wells's "The Man Who Could Work Miracles," where a greatly imaginative—and profoundly human—fantasy could be set forth with delightful actuality.

There is also a large, almost unexplored field in fairy tales both ancient and modern, in weird and fantastic poetry, in the prose of writers who let the lightning of truly creative imagination or the rainbows of quaint fancy play upon the borderland between the real and the unreal. As diverse writers as Poe, James Stephens, Wells (in his earlier work),

Anstey, Coleridge, Barrie, and many others could be named. Yes, we are perfectly aware that Barrie's "The Admirable Crichton" *has* been produced—as "Male and Female."

For, if there is an Ariel in Prospero's service, there is also a Caliban.

> *Pro. (Aside.)* I had forgot that foule conspiracy
> Of the beast *Caliban* and his confederates
> Against my life: the minute of their plot
> Is almost come.

The fact remains that the production of solid, stodgy, ranting, weepy, hectic travesties of real life founded on second-rate novels and magazine stories is, at this writing, the Caliban of the movies. In such productions half the reasons for the movies existing as an independent art are deliberately abjured. No use is made of their immense facilities for rendering difficult illusions convincing or

great flights of the imagination poignantly real. There is only a crude representation, usually soggy with sentiment, of a theme that could be far more artistically handled either in the written world or on the stage. Its best moments are of overstressed ranting action, necessary to get the wordless effect "over"; its worst are those passages where the written or spoken word would be most significant, but where the mere dumb show is obvious and wearisome. We have witnessed any number of these "real life" dramas, and yawned our way out. From the deliberately "significant" movie good Lord deliver us! Whereas what "majesticke visions," "harmonious charmingly," if Prospero would only call on Ariel more often!

We must leave it there. Much of the world's greatest literature belongs in the magical, fantastic realm. And the movies

could far more easily make us believe in the actuality of an Aladdin's lamp or Wells's men in the moon than in the stock characters, stock situations, stock plots, and stock tragedy and comedy of their translations from the literature of "real life." Let Prospero call on his spirits to "enact his present fancies." There have been so few experiments in the movies' own natural field. So far Caliban has threatened Prospero to some effect with "all the infection that the Sunne sucks up." Yet is Prospero, indeed, "so rare a wondred father" that we marvel he has heretofore so rarely and so feebly dared to wave his wand.

W. R. B.

## SHAMEFACED ART

"GREAT art demands passionate appreciation." It would be interesting to take a consensus of American opinion upon that pronouncement. Many smiles could be counted, much ironic comment heard, but we fear that unqualified acquiescence would be confined entirely to the folk commonly supposed to inhabit batik-hung studios in Greenwich Village. And yet the dictum is mere truth.

Say it in French, "Great art demands passionate appreciation." It would not sound half so silly. But of course. Great art is a passion of the spirit.

Here in the United States we pride ourselves upon being a rugged people, and we are upon business bent. We are doers, not

dreamers: building blast furnaces and factories, growing and reaping vast acreages of wheat, indulging in engineering feats, volubly advertising all products under the sun, attending conventions, amassing money, enthralled by country houses, motor cars, and golf links. Each to his job, we say—but art is not a job; art is a luxury. Pleasant if you can afford it. Yes. But it is not real work.

The cultivated foreigner, however, looks curiously upon our activities and ingenuities coupled with our casual neglect of a native art. In our department stores, for instance, he notes the superabundance of our books, their attractive jackets, the hard-hitting "appeal" of their advertisements. But literature? Here and there, perhaps, buried in the welter somewhere, lying rather out of it, lost in the spreading shadow of best sellers. "Do you judge all books, then, by the

number of copies they sell—every author by the amount of his royalties?" To the foreigner it would seem so.

The general public in America does so judge. Of what import that a man should write a book if it is not what the majority of the people want to read? The greatest authors have always appealed to the most people. Other books fail by comparison. Such is the verdict. To everything, even to books, we apply a standard of Usefulness which we interpret most singularly. As for your "Great art demands passionate appreciation," that is merely a whine from the little fellows who have not "succeeded." Trust healthy American judgment to pick the right books, the big books, the books that count.

But unfortunately, rugged though he may appear, a true artist is compact of sensibility and subtlety. He is not to be measured with

a yardstick, appraised in a generalization formulated by the average intelligence. He can be truly approached only by minds at least desirous of the qualities his own evinces. His work is also the product of an intellectual passion, inevitable in creation, not written for this "purpose" or that. Only where it meets an answering passion of the mind is its full meaning delivered. This older nations understand. We, not yet.

We are too much afraid of seeming anything but red-blooded, rough, rugged, hale, hearty, healthy. Subtlety is insidious, sensibility we confuse with weakness, art with "artyness." We take refuge from what we do not understand in our chief pride, our National Sense of Humor. Strange how much escapes it!

So beside the business man and the professional man the artist goes shamefaced.

He adopts perforce their heartiness, their healthiness, their rough, rugged, hale red-bloodedness—at least superficially. He endeavors to make his writing into as much of a business as possible. He hopes to appear "practical." He fears to be accused of temperament. Or he simply does nothing of the sort, rebels entirely, and, in the eyes of the general public, enters the national sideshow of freaks.

A truly preposterous situation, for it is as if the social body practiced a deliberate stultification of its own keenest sense organs. The intelligence of the true artist is the nerve centre of his age. Through him alone do we truly see, feel, and come to understand our time.

It is no plea for special dispensation to point out that such widespread indifference and misjudgment stunt the growth to mental

maturity of any nation. When the artist is regarded as a true worker and not a drone in our society, when the many strive at least to meet him on his own ground instead of always insisting that he must meet them on theirs, then only will the great energy that is in the brawn and sinew of our social body have a fit brain and spirit to guide it.

W. R. B.

## IGNORANT ART

TIME was that a dime novel was a dime novel, but now it sells for $2 and is called literature. Why is it that a hundred million people can produce only a handful of novels and short stories in a year which have more real value for humanity than a course dinner that is gobbled down and forgotten? It is usual to damn an undiscriminating public for this failure in art; but it is not the public that writes fiction. The American public for a hundred years has been reading the best fiction written abroad. A half dozen English story tellers have had their reputations made in America.

We believe that editors do not give their best public what it wants. But editors do

not write the fiction they publish. They cannot make silk purses out of sows' ears, even if they want to, which has not yet been proved. Every editor will assert that he is searching for genius, and if we are not convinced that he knows genius when he sees it, we must admit his further contention, that water cannot rise above its source.

No; public taste, ease of publication, variety of interest, even editorial capability, have all risen with the intellectual development of the country; only the professional writers, as a class, have not progressed. They have become astonishingly clever, as clever as the mechanism of a Ford; but as a class they have not moved ten feet towards literature. They have standardized their product without improving the model.

For one thing, as a class they do not know enough. It is nonsense to suppose that a

man can write a great book with substance and endurance to it unless he knows more, much more, than the general reader. Yet let that general reader take the average short story, or serialized novel, and test it for the real wisdom involved. If he finds a range of knowledge beyond his own he will be lucky. The intellectual background of much expensive American fiction is just about equal to that of the average college graduate a year after he has taken his degree.

Furthermore, as a class they do not think enough. It is absurd to suppose that a good book, with any seriousness to it, can be written without hard and deep thinking. Our writers of fiction are sprinters. Their bottom has been sacrificed to speed. They can be incredibly clever, but not even moderately profound. The general reader does not want to be bored by heavy thinking, but

he does want something more valuable than the commonplace thoughts of everyday Americans, chopped, peppered, and put into a brilliant short story. If he cannot reflect himself, he wants some one to reflect for him; and our story writers seldom reflect. They are too busy writing, to reflect. They are so busy building potato bins that they don't hoe their potatoes. Literature without reflection behind it is oyster soup without oysters. The two greatest American stories, "The Scarlet Letter" and "Huckleberry Finn," are products of reflection even more than of art. How can a brain attached to a typewriter and fed on nothing more nourishing than hurried thinking hope to rival them?

It is not fair to call our professional writers, as a class, illiterate; but ignorant by any severe standard they certainly are, and

the numerous exceptions who do know, and do think, confirm the criticism by the astonishing difference of their product. It is not fair to call our professional story tellers trivial, but, as a class, superficial they certainly are, especially the cleverest and the most emotional among them. Most of the stories that are called "great" in the advertisements fail to make the reader think or feel anything he has not thought or felt a hundred times before. Most of them give him a picture of life and himself that is false.

There is a theory generally held that you have to know an immense amount to be a scholar, or a scientist, that you have to think deeply to be a lawyer, that you have to feel intensely to be a musician, a painter, or a preacher; but that to be a writer all you need is a fluent pen, some acquaintance with Alaska, the South Seas, or the slums, and a

mind ingenious in character depiction and plot. It is a bad theory, and this year, which has seen at least four fine American novels in which study, reflection, and matured knowledge have confirmed and strengthened art, is a good year in which to proclaim its badness. The American writer's best public is deserting him for foreign literature because he tells them nothing they do not already know.

H. S. C.

## SLOVENLY PETER & DAPPER SAM

We remember only too well the Slovenly Peter of our childhood, who wouldn't keep himself clean, wouldn't clip his finger nails, wouldn't brush his hair. Are there too many Struwel Peters in American literature?

The critics think so, especially university critics. They manhandle our realistic poets of the Mississippi Valley, execrating flat rhythms, ugly words, dishevelled phrases. They quote selected passages from our serious novels full of loose constructions and blurred meanings, passages that read as if a mouthful of words had been spat at the page. They fling out at journalism which with a jaunty air rips off whole paragraphs that mean little or nothing, or, like the finan-

cial editor's forecasts, take back at the end what the beginning proposes.

There is as much slovenly writing in America as there is slovenly dressing in England. And both come from the same cause, the opiate of "don't care." And precisely as your person of literary or social worth in England is most likely to dress on ordinary occasions as the whim or the nearest articles suggest, so that a hideous bonnet or a pair of wrinkled trousers are much more likely to belong to a viscountess or a baronet than to a shop girl or a bank clerk, just so a careless, take-me-for-what-I-am fashion of writing (especially in fiction) is very likely in America to accompany real substance, deep observation, and intense sincerity. He who is hailed by many as our greatest novelist is one of the worst manipulators of English that ever wrote books worthy to be read.

And yet Slovenly Peter is not so familiar in America, and not half so dangerous to the cause of real literature, as Dapper Sam. Slovenly Peter, like many a bad boy, may grow up to be one of the mighty. When his finger nails begin to annoy him, he will clip them. When dirty hands become distasteful, he will wash them, and he will wash them well. But Dapper Sam is already as grown up as he will ever be. He is finished; and he knows it and is proud of it. There is nothing in him to reform.

Dapper Sam is legion. He writes the short stories that are perfectly built and mean nothing. He writes the plays that conform, like straw hats, exactly to this year's model. It is he who is responsible for the deathly English of so much competent journalism—sentence after sentence without

one phrase of distinction, one word chosen with care. He has developed a style for novel writing which is like a sounding gallery, all echoes of past voices, nothing that is his own, nothing that carries personality, nothing that some one else could not have written. He writes ream after ream of mediocre poetry, prettily phrased, adequately rhymed, that travels, like the parcel post, all over the United States; quite fit to print, quite fit to read, but as empty of individuality as souls which have lost touch with their egoes.

Dapper Sam never meditates, never grows spiritually excited, never is wrought up over his fellow man, never makes English his own. He writes, but he does not compose; he borrows words, but does not own them. He never plays upon his instrument, but puts roll after roll of records into

the aperture and treads out competent and mechanical music.

The editors, perhaps, have helped in his making, for he serves their purpose well, both in quantity never failing and in a quality which, like canned tomatoes and gasolene, can be bought safely with foreknowledge as to what one is getting and how it will be received. The public, quite certainly, are at least equally responsible—our slovenly, good-natured public, who wish to read quickly, painlessly. He is made in the image he has selected. We can do nothing for him. He can do nothing for himself.

The creature, like the movies, and chewing gum, and the yellow press, and standard collars, has a real usefulness in a democracy in process of being educated. But he should be branded. Critics should hang "Dapper Sam" across his shoulders. He should be

prevented from snubbing the Slovenly Peters, who, unkempt though they may be, are better than he is. He should be forbidden to pass for the man of letters he is not.

H. S. C.

## "IS IT WHAT OUR READERS WANT?"

It seems high time to reëxamine a shibboleth that has for many years simplified editing for the Gileadites of the blue pencil in the strongholds of financially successful American magazines. Large corporations nowadays conduct groups of such periodicals. To their editors the test query that heads this article appears beautifully practical and logical and is, in actual value, exquisitely the reverse. It is obvious that we are not speaking here of magazines specializing in any definitely circumscribed field, nor of the ancient and overdignified "quality group," as advertisers call it. We refer to the great moneyed mediums popularly supposed to en-

courage creative literature. The truth is that American readers are left still *wanting* by the modern magazine, however, prevalent be a certain form of specious and meretricious writing.

Modern advertising has degenerated simply into a study of how the desire to spend money may be played upon by any one with a product to sell. Its peculiar (to say the least) application of psychology has gradually taken hold of the handling of periodical literature. Whether or not you "go in" very thoroughly for statistics, you attempt to ascertain the particular kind of trash that soothes without puzzling the stereotyped mind; the concocted verisimilitude that passes for "real life" with the unthinking. You work out its value in dollars and cents as a circulation builder. You arrive at a mathematical conclusion that has no more to do

with that difficult and delighting art we call "good writing" than a mail order catalogue. You can then compose a recipe for the kind of thing your readers will "eat up." Sex, sensationalism, sentimentality, "up to the minute" stuff. And think of the money you can make at it! If you make money the magazine is a success; you, as a writer, are a success; you can buy a country place in the environs of Manhattan and own your own car.

This, then, is the Lure of Literature for the younger writers in America who have a style and something to say. They either succumb to this philosophy or they do not. If they do not, well, their experience in the past has been that they do not flourish, though the necessarily independent attitude of the strong-minded young writer is, to a slight degree, better recognized now, due to much painful

pioneering. But in general the old meaningless query, "Is it what our readers want?" rules supreme.

For we know well enough what they want —want in its true sense of "lack." They want a literature that is a living expression of unusual personalities, not a syncopated tune, played on a cash register, by shrewd but mediocre minds. They *want* analyses of human beings by minds capable at least of intelligent, if not of profound, interpretation; they *want* stories dealing with old situations, either in the light of modern rationality, what there is of it, or, at least, from a freshly personal point of view. They *want* work of intellectual integrity and uncompromising individuality. They *get* the products of fake, sensationalism, compromise, adherence to formula. They get fed to them constantly everything that appeals to their worst tastes,

to their cheapest desires, to their weakest (if unanalyzed) emotions. They gobble this pap, and the editors wax proud that they "know human nature."

For it works out in dollars and cents, you see. It works out in dollars and cents. Is not that, after all, the highest standard? Turning to the days of the early Renaissance, when the passion for ideas and culture was otherwise, we are led to wonder just how greatly the world progresses. Well, we have at least produced some few smaller publishers and booksellers, who, thrive as they may, tend with ingenuous ardor the flickering flame on the altar of good writing. We have seen a few of the smaller "faddish" magazines evincing a real desire for independent expression. The flourishing magazine companies that exist as large commercial organizations primarily cannot wholly over-

shadow the country with the dollar mark. They merely do the best they can.

Think it over. Take a glance at the magazine counter in any subway station; weigh and analyze the amount of yawp, buncombe, purely meretricious appeal. Then decide whether this attack is ill-grounded or not. And, in the last analysis, the remedy lies with the readers. It is by their suffrages that such a condition exists. What do *you* want?

W. R. B.

## LITERARY REVIVALISM

THE religious revival is still a phenomenon that exercises peculiar power over the minds of the multitude. But its heyday has passed. The awakening of a "social consciousness," through treatise and oratory, much of it in the revival spirit, has also lost its first, fine, careless rapture. Is the time now ripe for purely literary and artistic revivalism? Would it be possible to sway audiences in the cause of art and literature with any of that strange power over the emotions possessed, for instance, by even the shabbiest of Gospel-shouters? Would it be possible to organize any kind of a crusade in the cause of literature? Could the right influence conceivably be wielded to convert the many?

In the case of one modern poet and pamphleteer, sturdy effort to awaken small towns to an appreciation of literature and art (accompanied by exhortations to civic improvement) has recently met with some success in the Middle West. Consideration of what this man has done inspires our interrogation. Nothing like the influence of a Ruskin on the art of the England of his time has heretofore come to pass in the case of literature in America. We have had our Elbert Hubbard and our Chautauqua for the rank and file, experiments like Seymour Eaton's Booklover's Library, but little beyond this. We have the present bookselling campaign, with its slogan of "Buy a Book a Week," we have the publisher's blurb and the shouting advertisement. But the average person (not the bookish or naturally artistic person) lacks the proper mental stimulus

from minds possessed of a truly discriminating enthusiasm for literature.

Literature in itself is a term that the average person looks at suspiciously. Discourses by eminent authorities on letters he shuns. Sensitive and detached essays on the peculiar charm of rare and classic volumes he will not read. He needs a combination of the circus barker and the genuine savant with a distinct sense of humor to awaken his perceptions to the glamour and pleasure residing in really good books. For he will fight like a steer against "improving his mind."

And, unfortunately, so few of us are properly qualified to be barkers before the booth of literature. Though we sing, beat the tom-tom, whine, or shout, the general public, unimpressed, drifts by. The publishers' posters, where every new novel is hailed and acclaimed as the greatest some-

thing since something else, and extracts from press clippings furnish starred ejaculations—these, oh, they are just "advertising"! What shall I read? Read the reviewers? Which can I trust? I'll read some book they're all saying the same thing about. It stands to reason there must be something in it, if they're all talking about it; and then I can talk about it, too. That is the way the average man chooses his seasonal reading.

So the need is for some Billy Sunday or Gen. William Booth of literature, with the same power over the spirit of the masses that these exhorters exercised in the name of the Gospel in the past, and yet, let us hope, with a good deal more intelligence and better taste than have been evinced by at least one of them. Such a man could perhaps do a good deal toward arousing popular interest in the best books, more than Elbert Hub-

bard or the Chautauqua, five-foot shelves, special editions, or any number of cheap fiction libraries.

How he is to operate is another question. The poet we referred to has mapped out thoroughly and originally his own campaign for the State of Illinois. But what is more important, he has succeeded in beginning to "put it over." Why? First, because he convinces as an actual practicing creator in the art he preaches. Second, because he is possessed of an almost dæmonic enthusiasm inherited from a religious revivalist parentage. He has turned all the exhorter's desire for spiritual regeneration into a new channel. Art and literature have possessed him as his parents were possessed by the flames of religious faith. Third, he possesses extraordinary sensitiveness to all manifestations of beauty, and a distinct power of discriminat-

ing between the genuine and the tawdry in art, and between the dead and the living.

This is the type of new literary revivalist, possibly with some modifications, who might do much for a renaissance of literary interest in America, that those who came to scoff might remain to pray, that one of the most valuable stimuli to the spirit of man might be regained for our nation. Truly, where a soul is saved to the appreciation of good writing, intellectual integrity, genuinely fine feeling—and out of the snares and pitfalls of mere emotional welter, sentimentality, raucous unreality, highly seasoned melodrama—the composite soul of a nation is enlightened and strengthened by just that much.

W. R. B.

# THE MASQUERADING TRACT

WHY is it that so much of the writing of the day, while vivid and provocative enough, is yet ineffectual as criticism of life and imperfect as art? That our intellectual journals, with all their earnestness, are hardly less ephemeral in nature than their less sober fellows—the fiction magazines? That our novels with a moral, like "Main Street" and "Winesburg, Ohio," will in all probability in a few years' time have gathered the cobwebs of literary history? That our poetry with a didactic bent will live only in the anthologies if at all?

In part at least it is because American literature of the present has acquired a propagandist turn, and is serving the ends of

particular theses rather than of universal art. In our lightest fiction, as well as our most solid criticism, we have taken to pointing a moral to adorn our tale. What the tract essayed to do in the past, the novel, the review, even poetry attempts to do to-day. True, the intention is frequently disguised; often, perhaps, not consciously present in the mind of the author. But nevertheless it exists. Take, for example, the type of story that appears in the *Saturday Evening Post*—the most widely read of our periodicals. What does it do but preach again and once again the value of daring, self-confidence, and resourcefulness? It is a sugar-coated homily on those virtues. Take our current criticism. Most of it is unbiassed in the sense that it is free from personal animus, but how little of it is divorced from the writer's desire to maintain some political, or social, or ethical

thesis. Take a novel like "Main Street." It is a tract against the soul-shattering experiences of life in a small town.

Now, the desire constantly to enforce a moral or establish a theory may lead to an elevated literature, but it also conduces to a cramped one. You cannot square the circle in literature any more than in mathematics. If you have to exalt a precept you must of necessity subordinate to it other generalities. You become a special pleader. And since special pleading is apt to be of the moment and rigidly circumscribed you produce a literature that lacks the qualities that make for power and endurance.

Matthew Arnold summed up the rule for English criticism in the one word "disinterestedness," and maintained that criticism was to show its disinterestedness by "steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior,

political, practical considerations about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them . . . but which criticism really has nothing to do with." And surely it is at least in part, because our present-day criticism has departed so far from this rule, because it is in such large measure polemic and controversial, that, despite its frequent keenness and occasional brilliance, it has made little lasting contribution to letters.

With fiction we are in no better case. Our more serious novelists, like our critics, are writing to establish definite contentions. Instead of looking upon society as a whole, they are focusing their vision on its excrescences, and exhibiting instead of the organism itself its festers and its sore spots. The great Victorians were wiser. They, too, saw the shortcomings and injustices of their time; and they, too, levelled the shafts of their art

against them. But they never forgot that the whole is larger than its part, and they depicted the human drama in its grandeur as well as in its pettiness. Because they showed life as more various than the conditions against which they were directed, Dickens's novels have outlived the abuses which he flayed in them. Because he saw something in human nature to exalt as well as to satirize, Thackeray is with the immortals.

We do not wish to decry the high intention that goes into much of the more serious writing, both critical and imaginative, of the day. But we do wish to maintain that so long as our authors continue to use their talents to expound a thesis, or exploit a prejudice, so long as they isolate phenomena and on the basis of those isolated phenomena generalize about life, they will produce criticism that

will interest the reader of the moment and will hold the reader of the future not at all, and fiction that will have a local but not a lasting or universal appeal. They will give to the world a significant literature, but not a distinguished one.

A. L.

## ON LITERARY STRUCTURE

Two main classes of creative prose writing can be discerned in America to-day: that which editors stamp as "good fiction," that which our younger writers attempt and believe in as "literature." The former is built according to a formula with definite structural qualities we all recognize. The latter is in numerous instances experimental, tentative in outline, meandering, amorphous—for the best of our young writers, with genuine gifts of imagination, observation, and realistic truthfulness, have turned definitely away from the formulas of the current periodical.

Let us examine such formulas a little more closely. In the first place, the new magazine writer who becomes a nine days' wonder is

usually the man or woman possessed of intimate and first-hand knowledge of some particular locality and class of people, rather than a being of truly superior intelligence. Such a writer may genuinely and sincerely portray actual life, whether that of the East Side Semite, the Southern negro, the professional baseball player, or any other group, but his most valuable contribution remains merely local color. His talent is very definitely circumscribed. He simply supplies new backgrounds for old plots, new "lingo" for old characters. He also supplies the old, obvious, and easily grasped motivation, swift action, and robust, middle-class sentiment.

We could indeed give the young author two sound pieces of advice on how to succeed as a magazine writer. One is to pick at once a locality not already exploited in fiction. Given the opportunity to emigrate to Zam-

boanga or Van Diemen's Land for an intensive study of the natives in those parts, all the better. Let him get to know thoroughly the local colloquialisms, what the inhabitants have for breakfast and dinner, their tribal customs, how they furnish their houses, their folk-lore, table-manners, all their daily whims, habits, and humors. *Then* let him concoct a plot.

Let him concoct it with due regard to the popular human triangle and around the three great central facts of life—birth, love, and death. Let him remember that there must *always* be a love "interest" and a more or less happy ending. Let him remember that the story must be built according to one of a very few time-hallowed designs, preferably plotted to satisfy the magazinist's craving for two essentials, viz., some kind of a mystery that is solved and—the triumph of the under-

dog—that is, a certain conventional type of underdog.

So far, so good. This is the "straight dope." But what of younger writers who impress by their intelligence yet refuse to conform to any such set standards and rules? "Real life isn't that way!" they submit, sometimes haughtily. And, of course, we know it isn't. All our lives have definite beginnings, when we are first thrust forth congestedly squalling into a cold world. Beyond that? Have they really any one definite turning point, any definite climax, indeed any great reason for being that we can point out (whatever we may hope or believe)? No. Is not life infinitely more complicated and involved than the formulas would seem to indicate? It is. Is not present-day society in a state of undeniable flux and uncertainty? It is. Are not the new departures of science

and philosophy, the social ferment, the international tangle, the new reforms, the new freedoms, the new prohibitions, the "new" everything so qualifying and coloring our lives and the thought of our time that it is almost impossible to expect clear-cut and definite intaglios of the period from any writer possessed of real greatness as an interpreter? Yes. Are these old cut-and-dried textbook and magazine-office formulas then all we need? How about new forms, experimentation, pioneer efforts? How about them indeed! It seems to us entirely natural and a witness of life that they should appeal more strongly to the rising generation of writers than the mechanical, commercialized process that have raised so high the average technical excellence of our fiction—and so stultified and deadened its intellectual content.

But. The eternal "but," again. How

about *combining* structure and the fine frenzy? How about pouring new interpretation, new vision, a new depth and universality of appeal (aside from mere local color) into—not the old moulds, necessarily, but into moulds nevertheless, from which form—not formlessness—may emerge? To use another figure, how about building the new fiction upon some definitely articulated skeleton, rather than letting it meander forth in an essentially invertebrate and jellyfish condition as to structure, however vivid, virile, and true its content? Can no golden mean be arrived at, or rather, is not the full Shakespearean equipment (in lesser degree, we may grant) still possible: interpretation of one's own state of society with universal appeal, understanding of human nature, and a true sense of the baffling complexities of life conveyed, at the same time, with

sharp technique, definite structure, satisfying form?

It has been done in the past with the—at that time "new"—revelations of the past. It may even, we venture to say, have been done once or twice within the last ten years. Certainly it can be done again—living, breathing sculpture by new Pygmalions, wrought from the common clay of life that lies all about us!

W. R. B.

## THE YOUNG REALISTS

We forget the precise age of Malvolio, but we think that famous Puritan was of about the same age as our younger realists. Though less brainy, like them he was cross-gartered and despaired of his world.

The younger realists do not like America. Our much admired country, once dotted with friendly villages, the home of virile pioneers, seems to them in a stage of pimply indigestion following upon the colic of the industrial revolution. Simplicity has given way to frivolity, courage to shrewdness, craftsmanship to the machine-made, beauty to ugliness, spiritual energy to greed, joy of working to the dulness of routine. The man who invents a corn cutter to save labor succeeds

only in damning a town by making it wealthy. The village that tries to get educated sticks half way and becomes a horrid example. Love degenerates into a guerrilla warfare between selfishness and appetite. Out, cursed spot, that calls itself Dayton, or Chicago, or New York! they cry, and back to the fresh simplicities of the '70's, or forward to some new social organization where a man can own his soul again!

We should be much inclined to agree with them (except as to the fresh simplicities of the '70's), if they did not take such a cross-gartered view of the matter. Surely the world has creaked this way before and got over it. Surely, Ohio, let us say, is not quite so dull and drab and hopeless a place as they make out, even now, when prosperity has ruined it.

We prefer the philosophy of the older

realists. They knew what *messieurs les jeunes* have just discovered, that all is vanity, and they said so in great swinging phrases that made kings take action not easily accounted for by economic theory. Consider Bossuet, for example, as he reflects upon the life of Maria Henrietta:

> Commencez aujourd'hui à mépriser les faveurs du monde; et toutes les fois que vous serez dans ces lieux augustes, dans ces superbes palais à qui Madame donnait un éclat que vos yeux recherchent encore; toutes les fois que, regardant cette grande place qu'elle remplissait si bien, vous sentirez qu'elle y manque, songez que cette gloire que vous admiriez faisait son péril en cette vie, et que dans l'autre elle est devenue le sujet d'un examen rigoureux, où rien n'a été capable de la rassurer que cette sincére résignation qu'elle a eu aux ordres de Dieu et les saintes humiliations de la pénitence.

And if the French is difficult of translation, substitute the terser Latin of Ecclesiastes: *"Vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas."*

Did this brave Bossuet, knowing that all, all (even realism) was vanity, lose interest in the doings of the great and spirited lady whose earthly career he was celebrating? On the contrary. The conviction that in the sight of God a thousand years were as a day gave him a certain perspective that our moderns lack. Once you are convinced (and are they convinced?) that spiritual, or, if you prefer the term, ideal, values only count, you become more tolerant of the poor human animal, running hither and thither, burrowing, acquiring, loving, dying. You may smile at his vain endeavors (and the sense of humor is born), you may pity his pretensions and so gauge fairly his attempts to be heroic, you feel the childishness of his pettier sins, and so are not afraid.

The young realists who cross-garter their spirits until all this bustling, irrelevant life of

ours in America becomes a sordid struggle among machines, are afraid of life. They are of the seed of the martyrs, and they will go to the stake before they will smile at the spectacle of civilization trying to ruin itself, as it has always done, and has often succeeded in doing. But they lack the qualities ascribed to angels, who, so we are told, are made by men both to laugh and to weep.

H. S. C.

## ON REVIEWING

THERE used to be three kinds of reviewing, and now there are at least four, but they are not the same kinds.

There was, in earlier days, the voluminous essay that took a book for its text, and then forgot the book in a brand new treatment of the subject. Often enough the book died and the review lived on as literature. More often the book lived on and the essay perished of its own irrelevant dulness. There was the venomous review written to air a creed or satisfy a hate; and there was the book review proper, which stuck to its book like a starfish to an oyster, and gutted it.

In our time we are more various in our

reviewing. The essay-review has become more honest, calls itself an essay now outright, and instead of borrowing a theme from recent publications stands on its own subject and develops its own thoughts. By this the essay gains, the book suffers. For it is well known that makers of books would rather be talked about irrelevantly than not be talked about at all.

The venomous review has been transmogrified. The swashbucklers of criticism, who used to lay about with their "This will never do," and their "Contemptible scribbling puppy," and their "Purveyor of sedition and heresy," have given place to social reformers and radical theorists who will review any book that gives them a chance to preach, but neglect the rest. Gall has been exchanged for physic. Some prefer gall.

As for the gutter of books, the review

that followed the text wherever it led—specialists perform that task now in technical journals, just as specialists now perform the operations that once could be had in any barber's or apothecary's shop. No one reads the technical journals but specialists, and so books for the general reader, in this respect, have fared hardly.

They have space enough, however, if their subject permits, in a new kind of reviewing which has flowered like the dandelion in this our America. The gossipy review has become an American fashion. Where the critic of the quarterlies poured out his information, the new reviewer uptilts his personality. As in one, so in the other, the book is only an excuse for a display of words. As in one it was not the book that counted, but the essay about it, so in the other it is not the book either, it is the temperament of the re-

viewer. Not perception but a witty phrase makes a good criticism; and whether the reader buys the book is of little importance, provided he reads and is amused by the review of it.

What is good reviewing?

Certainly good reviewing must *review*—must dissect and expound, interpret, and praise or blame the book. All reviewers cannot be paragraphers, columnists, though that just now seems to be the fashion. Anything from autumn frocks to the nebular hypothesis may be criticised, but a book review must (curious that it is necessary to say it) re-see a book through the eyes of a critic and interpreter.

And certainly also a good reviewer will not bury himself in his book, like an ant in a sugar bowl. We are bored by reviews which see only the book and never its back-

ground, because they do not review the book; they merely photograph it, and usually by snapshot, and badly. To review a book is to discuss it in relation to literature, *its* literature especially, whether lyric poetry, mystery story, or character novel; to set it against this background and then to relate it to the interests and experience of the reader. A reviewer must neither stay outside nor inside of the book he is reading. He must be amphibious, or, better, like the airman, he must first look about him, and then soar. This is the art, as distinguished from the science, and the trade, of reviewing.

So much for the philosophy of book criticism. The practice is simpler than the theory and also more difficult. For it amounts merely to this: that every book should have the kind of reviewing which can best describe it and the reviewer who can best review it.

Uniformity is the curse of modern life; it is not merely a curse; it is unnecessary and unwise in reviewing. Good thinking needs good minds. Good reviewing requires, chiefly, good reviewers. Let us pray for them.

H. S. C.

## A SERMON FOR REVIEWERS

A. CLUTTON-BROCK, essayist and art critic of the London *Times,* frees his heart in a recent number of the *Nation and Athenæum* of a burden of reproach. Reviewing in England has been demoralized, he thinks, by a press that has no opinions of its own. "It has a notion that its readers wish to read reviews, and that they procure publishers' advertisements; but at the same time it sees small commercial value in them, grudges the space for them, and pays the reviewers as little as possible. And it is able to pay them very little because there are many people who like reviewing. When they begin it it seems delightful to get a book for nothing." But their very love of writing puts them in the

power of their employers, and they either give up reviewing or become mere hacks, who, since they must review more books than they can read in order to stay alive, must cultivate the art of concealing their ignorance. It is strange, he thinks, that publishers should waste space to quote from reviews which speak of "Undeniable charm of style," "Notable contribution to contemporary thought," "There is not a dull page from cover to cover."

Thus far, and with some show of ill-temper himself, A. Clutton-Brock. We leave to the consciences of newspaper reviewers, the judgment of American readers, and the perusers of publishers' advertisements how far his words hold good for America.

And yet, without ungenerously revealing our own opinions as to the facts of the case, there is one item that may be added to this

reviewers' sermon—one sin that is more deadly than reviewing a book without reading it because it is committed by men and women whose opinions really count. And this deadly sin is reviewing a book without comprehending it.

We swing too often in our better American criticism between the extremes of cool superficiality and warm sentimentalism. Either the reviewer bluntly and unsympathetically says whether the book is good or bad, and lets it go at that, in which he is a classifier merely, or, with a (haply unconscious) eye to the publishers' notices that will blazon his name so titillatingly in some subsequent week, he effervesces in a profusion of epithets that would have made a Greek stare and an Elizabethan long to show how enthusiasm could be expressed by a man with a real vocabulary.

And the book is either categoried, dis-

sected, desiccated until whatever life juice it had blows away in the dust of a dry style; or it is kissed to pieces like a lover's token, bedewed by caresses, mauled and toyed over by an enthusiast until its beauties are made as vulgar as a Broadway cheek.

Like Elijah, we believe ourselves one of an infinitesimal minority, the minority that still believes a book review should distinguish the merits and defects of a book and explain them; that does not believe it should be a contribution to publicity for the book, or the reviewer. And if there are thousands of others, as Elijah was told, that have not bowed the knee unto Baal, let them come forward; there will be many to welcome them. Yet we do not believe that merits are measured by inches, or defects either—so many paragraphs good, so many bad, the net result, as

the book review digest puts it, being + —. Such a symbol, and indeed mere statement, generally avails little, and sometimes nothing: it is the argument from authority, and in art there is no autocracy of opinion. Only in books of fact and theory are such literal pronouncements valuable. No, the reviewer's task is to merge his own personality for the moment with what life there is in his book, and when he writes communicate somehow, somewhere, its pulse to his reader. Many other things he should do, but this he must do if he is to write useful criticism, and we will never forgive him if he fails, unless, indeed, the book has no pulse.

Criticism, if we may conclude with a homely example, is neither the scales that weigh nor the icing that sweetens, but the yeast that, for readers, leavens the lump. A good re-

viewer must have cool brains and a warm heart. He must have enthusiasms and guard them, and his likings must be as strong as his hates. It is no profession for a hack.

H. S. C.

# PATRONS AND PATRONAGE

THE further we "progress" into the twentieth century the easier it becomes to defend the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. There were no *Saturday Evening Post* and *Hearst's Magazine* then to enrich the poor writer, few pots of gold with strings to them to be found anywhere. But as poets and playwrights remind us, in longing accents, there was always the patron, and not too uncommonly the patron of taste.

The patron of the arts as Chaucer knew him, and Shakespeare, and Dr. Johnson we do not want back again. It is true that without him much admirable literature would have remained unwritten or unpublished,

since the times provided no sure sustenance for most men of letters except by patronage. But the patron was, when all is said, a feudal chief. His service meant loyalty and respect for caste then; now it would mean servility. And if the bought pen that distributes modern propaganda is less honorable than those earlier writers of fawning preface and fulsome dedication, yet we would gain nothing by making flattery as profitable as it was in the past.

We do not want the feudal patron, but there is still need and opportunity for patronage. Capital now, as in Elizabeth's day, has a way of coyly choosing the pockets of a minority for her abiding place; and capital is a public trust, now as then, when, in theory at least, it was so held and so employed. That poets, novelists, dramatists who write finely for the few, instead of profitably for

the many, should be kept like dogs, servants, mistresses, offends our democratic sense, and rightly. We cannot accept the feudal viewpoint because our world is *not* feudal and probably never again will be. But there are better ways by which the rich man can grasp his opportunity.

Why is it that those who endow colleges, churches, societies, foundations with such care for perpetuity, and such precautions to secure usefulness, should have given so little money and little thought to the arts? It is arguable that a theatre or a magazine is as good a subject for proper endowment as an institution for scientific research, and not unarguable that it might be a more interesting one. Proper endowment, we say. That means endowed with due precaution that money shall be spent for expansion and attainment rather than mere security. "Root

hog or die" must remain somewhere in the prescription.

And what safer and more glorious use could be made of superfluous millions than to give the able writer what in his early maturity he needs beyond all earthly things—the precious gift of time? Art is the greediest of mistresses. Time she does not nibble at; she devours. Art is the most jealous of mistresses. In youth and in middle or later age she will share her chosen one with business, with teaching, with law, the labors of the hack, and routine of every description. But there is a year or two or more when she must have all of him—body and soul. All his thought, all his time, must be hers. Some fortunates can yield, more must resist for lack of sustenance, and lead a double life, not richly productive. An endowment for leisure—leisure to create, for those who have proved

their potentiality—how has such an obvious asset for a nation escaped its gift of millions?

For it must be remembered that the patron did not, as the vulgar suppose, save places at his table for needy creators merely because he hungered for praise. That is too easy an explanation. He desired, as we all desire, a more interesting life. They made life more interesting for him by giving it beauty, vividness, and significance—the service of literature. Education is one way of making life more valuable; literature is another. Neither should be pauperized or driven into commercialism. Both (until the millennium, when we shall be paid what work is worth in terms of true value to the human race; when perhaps not so many as now will feel the burden of millions), both may be helpfully subsidized.

H. S. C.

## COTERIES

THERE is gossip in literature as well as in politics. If it is no more reliable, it is usually less malicious; but there has been edge to recent discussion of those mutual admiration societies unlimited, called coteries, that specialize in publicity and have been sometimes successful in making men and women famous by the simple device of mentioning them at least three times a day. It sounds like the Buddhist's attempt to secure the attention of his god by numerous twists of his prayer wheel. Yet, whereas the Buddhist's success is perhaps open to speculation, abundant instances prove (so it is said) that if a group of friends shout each the other's name

at the great god Public he will turn his hairy ear, listen, and believe.

In London two coteries are said to dominate the field of current literature. If you write for fame it is well to belong to one or the other of them—praise your friends and be praised by them, damn and be damned by (a kind of reverse publicity) your enemies. But as the rival magazines around which the two coteries centre are published in the same street, and the editors thereof frequently lunch together, there is always the possibility of trading votes, or of a union against the outsider.

Are there literary coteries organized for mutual puffery in America? If so, the worse for American literature. Are there groups of friends and admirers who appreciate good work done obscurely and endeavor to obtain recognition for it? If not, the fact would

be surprising. Let those who believe that literature needs no advertisement consider how sound literature which happens not to be popular is to be brought before its best readers if not by its friends.

The publishers, speaking generally, do not do it. They are forced by what are believed to be the rules for success to praise all their books with a completeness that detracts from emphasis; and if there is any difference to be made, then they must praise most highly the books that will sell most readily. They dare not (here is the vicious circle) advertise a newcomer whose sole virtue is the excellence of his art until he has already been so much advertised that it pays to advertise him.

The general magazines will not do it. They must play for circulation, because without circulation they cannot print as many and as expensive copies as our magazines must

print nowadays to be regarded as respectable. They will play up their own coterie of established reputations, but new writers must pay an entrance fee in the shape of a "story" that will please everybody or have it paid for them in reputation made by their friends.

Critical reviews can do something for sound literature by obscure writers (whether new or old), but in a world of shrill advertisement and raucous claims of everything for everybody they can do relatively little. Editors are fallible; there are many books, reviewers are no more trustworthy than editors; space is at a premium; and the obscure by its very obscurity is hard to distinguish and dangerous to praise. The duty and the privilege of such reviews are clear. The performance will always be lagging.

We should therefore be charitable, at the least, toward the coterie here in America.

The poet who stops his public reading to speak well of another's poems may conceivably be paying a debt, but more probably is moved by enthusiasm for good poetry that he knows and his hearers do not. The novelist who praises his friend's novel may be hoping for a return of the consideration, but more probably is stirred by a sense of merit unrewarded. There is a loyalty to the profession among authors as among journalists. Both classes must labor against a proprietary public that will accept the indifferent in preference to the best, the cheap instead of the expensive. There are books, now justly famous in American literature, that would never have been published if the friends of the authors had not urged their publication, which would have been little read if some group of admirers (a coterie) had not publicly praised them. Something

should be said for the coterie. It is deplorable when it is used to exploit publicity. It is good when it is honest.

H. S. C.

## HOW CLASSICS ARE MADE

THE question at this writing is no longer, What is a classic? The publishers settled that long ago. A classic is a small, dun book, dog-eared, with to-morrow's assignment written on the fly leaf. Or it is a solid volume, handsomely upholstered, of the kind that is described as 8to or 4to and obviously belongs in a set.

The vital question is, How can a classic be made? For, curiously enough, in an age supposedly enamored of the ephemeral, classics are, financially speaking, an asset. They constitute the surplus of a publishing business, and a reasonable percentage of each new generation of authors must be classicized, added to surplus, so to speak, if the

business is to remain sound. But how can a classic be made?

It was made in the old days by sweating brains and toiling imagination, until thought and experience were distilled into expression. It won its way to recognition or it met instant approval: it was damned by the critics or was welcomed by them; in any case, it survived, and grew better and sweeter as the temporary in its pages blurred and the permanent gained emphasis.

But publishers nowadays have different ideas. They believe in speeding up the slow processes of fame. Sweating labor, toiling imagination, the slow ripening of appreciation, these with them are *vieux jeu,* useful but not indispensible. Go to, they say, we need a classic. And their procedure is not unlike the famous generations of the Bible; for Advertisement begets Publicity, and Publicity be-

gets Notoriety, and Notoriety begets Puffery, and Puffery begets Fame, and Fame begets a classic, which lives in the publisher's list from generation unto generation.

There must be a seed of Jacob from which all the prodigious growth may spring; there must be a good book, or, preferably, books; but with sound seed, good manure, and a proper cultivation anything is possible.

The experiment begins (to change the figure) with a gentle snow of press notices, whispering: "He is great"; "he is famous"; "Professor —— approves him"; "the —— Review ranks him with Fielding"; "the President is reading him." Follows a blast from the middle page of some weekly: "Did you know that G—— was an American classic? Read what they say!"

Then silence for a while to give the essayists, sluggish folk, time to turn uneasily in

their desk chairs, hear that another writer is worthy of "serious attention," and write. Essayists are the priests of classic making. They pour the sacred oil. But much is spilled, and much of it is water.

Then, by prearrangement, come mighty configurations on the rear pages of nationally circulated journals; family interiors with children in process of being cultivated, bookcases full of the works of G——, pictures of G—— in boxes, pictures of his heroes, his heroines, in characteristic attitudes. Also riddles, as: "If you were caught between floors in an elevator with a Bolshevik and a Vampire what would you do? Read G—— and learn what Joseph did." And then subscription offers, by sets, with a guarantee that a signature brings you intellectual happiness for life.

Last state of all, some one lectures on

G—— to the French Academy; he is reviewed (with gross errors of locality and a misspelling of his middle name) in the London *Athena,* and the *Literary Digest* reports him as having been heard of in Oxford (though not in the Bodleian). The classic is made.

The publishers, to tell truth, are often right (let us say almost every other time) in their selection of material for classics. And since publishers are not mere traders of the printed page, but gentlemen at least as cultivated as critics and writers of editorials, this is not surprising. Even the much-maligned publicity agent knows a good book when he sees one.

I do not, as Cæsar remarked, much dislike the matter, but the manner of their speech. It is not what they do. Heaven knows, literature, and American literature,

when it is good (great, one need not say) deserves all the honest advertising that can be given it. It is the way they do it. If some corn-fed writer of the Middle West, some chronicler of the deserted New England farm, some Californian, brilliant with the white light of the high Sierras, has written well, has made a bid for a popularity lasting beyond his first editions, let us not be niggardly in critical praise or advertisement. But overpraise will not insure him for posterity, and notoriety brings its reaction. Entered to the sound of horns and trumpets under surplus, he may prove to be watered stock, a bond with no security behind it.

Publishers should be prevented, under pain of loss of copyright, from using the word "classic" except at the equinoxes, and never for any author born after the mid nineteenth century.

H. S. C.

## PERNICIOUS LITERATURE!

A VERY plausible case may be made out for the perniciousness of literature. Philosophically considered, of what do the great books we read for our education consist? Of ideals belonging to a culture different from ours; of a morality based upon different conditions; of standards of chivalry, romance, class duty, which, however applicable once, for us, at best, are arbitrary; of taboos, religious, ethical, social, which have lost their *raison d'être.*

And of what do the good books of this generation fundamentally consist? Of attempts to impose upon the imagination of the reader the ideas of contemporary life

achieved by some partial observer; of an imperfect philosophy of living stereotyped in its imperfections and circulated widely.

The result (so it is said) is a cramping of natural development. Facts we feed and grow upon: but false ideas, stale principles, illusory ideals (like Scott's pseudo-mediævalism) clog the digestion, set up mental aches and pains, cause abnormalities, and check growth or thwart it. We have to live in the present; but even the new books we read would persuade us to think like 1919 or 1920; indeed, the prejudices and prepossessions of these books belong roughly a decade earlier. If we take to the classics, Boswell argues a fantastic feudalism; Shakespeare a departed aristocracy; Milton a lost theology; Keats lives in a world where industrialism does not exist. We may enjoy their books, nourish our imaginations there, *escape* from

life as it is. But we are marked by the experience; we are held back; we lose our mental freedom.

And therefore imaginative literature is pernicious, and the better it is, the worse for us!

There is no escaping this argument by denying it totally. It is through books which are the containers of tradition that the dead hand of the past reaches out to clutch. The merest popular novel in gay slip covers when analyzed reveals a complex of soul-numbing ingredients that is perfectly appalling. Ideas of honor drifted down from mediæval France; vague religious beliefs, part Christian, part Hebrew, part Mithraic; conceptions of a "gentleman" and a "lady" which belong to early Victorian literature; a moral code which came from Switzerland via Scotland and Ulster; neo-romantic sentimental-

ism left over from the 40's—this is just a beginning.

Do not think that you can read a book, even a bad book, without encountering conventions of thought which are as incongruous in this age as herds of bison or knights in armor. You take your sacred individuality in hand every time you open a book. You never shut one without having drunk in tradition with your draught.

All this is true, even if somewhat exaggerated in statement. But why have we become so arrogant about sacred individualities? Since when has a man ceased to take his ease in his Shakespeare—which he reads for the exalting of his spirit, and for the love of life, and for laughter and beauty—because he fears corruption from some slant on the mob, some hint of a trace of a moral code no longer workable! Since when have

we feared to share the spiritual experiences of our ancestors (and this is literature) lest these should persuade us to live, think, believe like them! But if we have any individuality worth considering we cannot be like them; and our thoughts will be poor thoughts, and our life a thin one, if we are afraid of our past. Only a coward thinks that literature is pernicious because it is old.

H. S. C.

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